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*Framing the Bride: Globalizing Beauty and Romance in Taiwan's Bridal Industry* by Bonnie Adrian

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Bonnie Adrian. *Framing the Bride: Globalizing Beauty and Romance in Taiwan's Bridal Industry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 297 pp. Hardcover \$55.00, ISBN 0-520-23833-8. Paperback \$21.95, ISBN 0-520-23834-6.

There is currently very little English-language scholarship on popular culture in Taiwan. Bonnie Adrian's *Framing the Bride* is therefore a welcome addition to the current academic exploration of Taiwan and is in some sense part of a larger shift in Taiwan studies as more scholars are becoming interested in this fecund field.

Adrian's work is a mix of cultural studies and careful fieldwork. She addresses several important theoretical issues in relation to gender and modernity including debates about globalization, Westernization, individualism, and gendered power relations in familial settings. She illustrates these points with clear and engaging ethnography. For example, what does it mean that a Taiwanese mother accuses her daughter of not being Chinese because she prefers to wear a *qipao* instead of a Western white wedding dress (p. 240)?

One of the greatest strengths of this study is its well-grounded presentation of historical context, from the process of urbanization to changes in the appearance of bridal photographs to a wide range of traditions associated with marriage, from fortune-telling to fertility rituals. Equally compelling is the analysis of modernity and the ways in which the old and the new have created new hybrid forms of Taiwanese identity.

As with any book there are a few points that one might quibble with. Adrian presents the grueling all-day ordeal that a bride must go through to produce bridal photographs as work, but suggests that the bride's labor is not alienated (p. 21). This contradicts her other statement that the bride is an object created for family prestige rather than her own individual needs (p. 144). Also, if alienation is taken to mean the divestment not only from the profit of one's actions but also from the meaning of one's production,<sup>1</sup> much in this book points to a quite marked sense of alienation through the production of images that reinforce normative standards of male dominance and parental authority/status through women's continued objectification and exploitation of their own bodies.

The author's assertion that bridal photographs do not represent individuality or individualism (pp. 22, 121, 221, 240) also seems problematic. While it is true that these photographic images do not seem to represent a Western Enlightenment individualism that encompasses a fantasy of political and economic autonomy



from society as a whole, there seems to be a marked celebration of the individuals involved in bridal photography. As Adrian points out, a bridal photograph represents the last time the bride has to shine before being subsumed into her husband's paternal line (pp. 178–179). Yet the meaning of the photograph and what happens after it is taken are not one and the same. Adrian's descriptions of the photo sessions—in phrases such as such as “bride as celebrity” (pp. 178–179) or “bride as romantic heroine” (p. 191)—reveal the fact that, at least at that particular moment, the bridal photograph represents a celebration of the individual. Adrian might counter my discomfort on this issue with her argument that the constructed nature of the photographs demonstrates multiple personae rather than individuality (p. 22). This is an important point but one that should problematize conceptions of the individual rather than dismissing the individual altogether. Adrian is not alone in making such claims (in other contexts), but a greater attention to some of the more prominent scholarship on this debate might have made this argument seem less tenuous or contradictory.<sup>2</sup>

Adrian is at her strongest in dealing with gender issues. Increasing economic power for women seems to have undermined parental authority but also increased women's dependence on mothers-in-law for child-care duties while they are at work—indicating a provocative role reversal from the services that younger women historically offered to older women in traditional Taiwan. Adrian also addresses the localization of “Western” inspired romance, the transformation of arranged marriages to “love matches” and a dating culture, the rising divorce rates, the widespread disillusionment with marriage on the part of women, a corresponding sense that the single life should be prolonged for as long as possible, and the growing number of educated women who reject marriage altogether.

The book also addresses traditional gender roles such as familial pressure to marry and bear offspring, parental interference with choice of spouse, and the status that parents continue to gain from lavish wedding expenditures.

To sum up, this book serves as a model for how to successfully mix cultural-studies theory and traditional fieldwork—carefully contextualizing modern behavior against the background of historical concerns. It is also one of the best books on gender in Taiwan that I have read. Adrian is articulate in her analysis and an engaging storyteller who offers many wonderful insights into Taiwanese culture. She presents an array of fascinating and well-documented issues with understanding, humor, and empathy. In short, this book is a phenomenal success, and I predict that it will quickly become a central text in Taiwan studies.

Marc L. Moskowitz

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## NOTES

1. For more on this see P. Steven Sangren, *Chinese Sociologies: An Anthropological Account of the Role of Alienation in Social Reproduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press [London School of Economics, 2000]).

2. See, for example, Douglas Kelner, "Popular Culture and the Construction of Post-modern Identities," in *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, ed. Anthony Giddens (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 141–177; Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Sarah Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Melford E. Spiro, "Is the Western Conception of the Self 'Peculiar' within the Context of the World Cultures?" *Ethos* 21, no. 2 (1993): 107–153; Nancy R. Rosenberger, *Gambling with Virtue: Japanese Women and the Search for Self in a Changing Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); and Nancy R. Rosenberger, ed., *Japanese Sense of Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).



Göran Aijmer. *New Year Celebrations in Central China in Late Imperial Times*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2003. viii, 180 pp. Hardcover \$32.00, ISBN 962-996-024-9. Paperback \$18.00, ISBN 962-996-103-2.

This book is written by a well-known anthropologist, but unlike his earlier works it is based on historical data drawn from local gazetteers and Chinese encyclopedic sources such as the eighteenth-century *Gujin tushu jicheng*. The author has studied Chinese traditional symbolism by analyzing Chinese New Year celebrations in the region around Lake Dongting in Hunan Province.

Part 1, "The Ethnography of the Hubei and Hunan Plains," consists of fifteen short chapters that describe the celebrations from the Little New Year to the Establishment of Spring. The Little New Year was celebrated on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth moon. This was the day the Stove God was worshipped, a practice that is still observed among Chinese in both China and Southeast Asia. From what we can observe today, New Year celebrations involve the symbolic ridding of the old (and all unfortunate events) and the welcoming of the new (with symbols of hope and prosperity). However, the author's symbolic analysis is largely derived from an agnatic lineage structure, which views women married into the lineage as a threat and a source of pollution. This, coupled with a number of speculations (the words "may be" and "possibly" appear rather often), allows the author to make a number of interpretations that are rather speculative. They raise the question of what is the use of anthropology if it is reduced to presenting knowledge deduced from a logical structure constructed by an anthropologist